Mito Church of Christ - Mito, Ibaraki JAPAN **Nov 2020 - Jan 2021**

Being His Hands

Mission Report & Prayer Requests: Mito, Japan

Joel & Kristin Osborne and Hiroaki & Megumi Akahoshi

Left: *Global friends of BCS gather online to celebrate;*
Center: *BCS grads & staff;*
Above: *Graduates together with their parents*

Joining Hands In Kingdom Work

Participation in God's mission is made so much richer by the relationships formed in partnership

So often both we and you think of what we share as extensions of God's hands and heart in His mission to redeem the nation of Japan. That certainly is one we do not take for granted, and one which we are thankful for.

Japan. Singapore. Malaysia. Cambodia. And through the web of relationships, it reaches to Canada and the US as well. The work we do together in Cambodia is one that has shaped and blessed us as a church in Mito too.

Just hours before writing this, we (**Joel & Hiro**) participated online in the first-ever graduation ceremony for **BCS**, our school in Cambodia that we began 9 years ago as a base for our service and outreach. Poverty and corruption in this Asian nation brings challenges on so many different levels for just as many different reasons. Today it was moving, though, to hear speeches from 3 of our 8 graduates and from 2 of their parents as we celebrated and honoured their achievement.

It was also moving to see our head teacher as the MC, a soon-to-be university graduate herself, and one of the first children we met and connected with at the local market way back in 2006. Seeing the faces of so many from various nations who have given and continue to give time, pray, and invest in the relationships we have formed and grown in this work stirred deep gratitude within. Some of those people met Jesus through this work in Cambodia and have since given their lives to him. A precious few, we continue to pray for the day when we can share that good news with you too.

Two graduates have enrolled in university in Siem Reap and have been selected for a paid internship at our school. Three more graduates leave this week to begin university in the capitol city, Phnom Penh, through scholarships from other organizations. Three more also plan to begin university soon. Thanks be to God!

Above: *Kaori (Megumi's younger sister) drew pictures of the two couples as a gift for our 5th wedding anniversary*

Left: *Manaka turned 2 yrs old on January 15 & had 3 little parties!*

Below: *the Akahoshis enjoy connecting on Zoom one Saturday morning with a former member now living and working in the States*

Left above: *Matt (pictured here with a current coworker) will work with Kristin in April @ IC;* ***Left below:*** *these 3 were baptized in Feb 2020; Ayaka (far left) will begin working with Megumi in April; Kanna will graduate & work with Gaku in April; Kaori will graduate in September*

An Unexpected Blessing…Or Two

While it's true that an overall goal of our work is multiplication of Jesus' disciples, we also are thankful for any additions too.
Well, in November the Akahoshis found out some news they weren't anticipating: they're expecting. Oh, but it gets better. They found out in December that they are having TWINS!
Due at the beginning of August, the doctor has told **Hiro** and **Megumi** that they'll likely be born, though, earlier in July once the twins are at a safe size and weight. So **Manaka**, who just turned two in January, will be a big sister soon.
Manaka is talking a lot more and she has some vocabulary in both Japanese and English. Every day, she prays 'Jesus, thank you' in both languages and we all delight in her. She is a happy, beautiful, and intelligent little girl who is expressive and curious, but a little shy.
As the Akahoshis prepare for the addition of two more, pray for a healthy and blessed pregnancy.

All Things New: Looking Ahead

It seems hard to believe that another school year is almost in the books!
With test season and just how national holidays have fallen, **Kristin** has had a lighter load in January, and we are so thankful she has a job where she could fully take off and rest from Dec 25-Jan 6. She enjoys working at Ibaraki Christian High School, and often comes home with stories about good interactions with her coworkers and students, so that is a blessing for all of us. One of her coworkers is retiring, so she is excited to have **Matthew Miller** from our church family (and one who has become our friend too) taking that position in the Jr High from April. Please pray for them as they look at and decide about new curriculum etc.
Megumi will also go on maternity leave again this summer, but first she welcomes **Ayaka Kawanobu**, a church member just baptized a year ago, to join her in the work and mission at the Keisen Christian Kindergarten & Daycare. Please pray for them and their work with small children and their families.

Hope, Peace, Joy & Love: Christmas 2020

- A quieter, simpler Christmas lacked none of the joy experienced yet gifted us with good rest -

We are mindful that many of you reading this were unable to be with family members, enjoying the usual festivities and memory-making moments that come at this time of year - American Thanksgiving, Christmas & New Year's. We certainly have not taken for granted that we could enjoy a day of rest and love shared as we celebrated what it means for our lives and for all of creation that the Christ child was born, that God-with-us came in flesh.

Usually we'd have a large group, and multiple groups at that, coming to our home but this year we just had one day of celebration with a smaller group. There was no Christmas potluck nor Christmas Eve candle service & cafe afterwards, but as a church family we did find ways to share the gospel story and find joy perhaps in deeper ways through the simple moments together. We enjoyed seeing family in Canada and the US, connecting on Facetime & Messenger. All in all, we remembered that giving thanks to God makes every day better.

Above: Hiro, Megumi & Manaka, Kristin, Misaki, Bryan, Matt & Yoshiki. (Not pictured: Joel, *who took the pic, and* ***Ami*** *who came after work - she's a nurse who does home health care visits & clinics, especially for elderly)*

Scaling Back To Online: State of Emergency

- A third wave of COVID-19 in the nation calls for stricter measures in Ibaraki prefecture -

While Japan has not experienced the dramatic loss experienced in Europe or North America, the third wave of this pandemic has definitely kept us humble and prayerful. Mito Church leaders determined that we should pause on in-person gatherings for worship for two weeks in January, which ended up being extended through February 7 when the governor of Ibaraki prefecture declared a state of emergency from January 18. We have just been notified it will again be extended through February 28, so the leaders are now prayerfully discerning how we will proceed with worship for the remaining 3 Sundays of the month.

There is definitely a heightened sense of loneliness and loss, as well as an almost overwhelming rise in mental health issues all around us. This also means that suicides, which Japan is already the highest or second highest nation for suicides annually, have risen as people seek to end their pain. In our messages and weekly studies, we have talked about this and prayed about this, seeking how we can be present and helpful.

Please join us in praying that God will open our eyes, ears, and hearts as we intentionally find ways not only to encourage each other, but also see the pain in others and seek to compassionately bring a healing word, a healing touch, a healing presence through Jesus.

Also, continue to pray our coworker, **Atsushi**. Hiro and I continue to take up all of the teaching, preaching, and pastoral ministry responsibilities at this time. We are thankful to work with a church who is willing to and proactive to find ways they can join us. This does require more time for coaching, but it's also exactly what we SHOULD and WANT to do. We are so pleased by the spiritual growth that we can see happening.

Finally, we ask you to ask God to **give us wisdom** as we make transitions out of 'survival mode' and as we readjust what and how we help the church continue to go deeper in discipleship and faith.

JAPAN MISSION

Nov 2020 - Jan 2021

Join Us In Prayer

* **Teaching & Preaching** – *we continue to do a **bible study online** on Wednesday nights, as well as personal studies with **Kanna**, **Kaori** & **Kentaro**. Joel & Hiro have preached multiple times monthly, and will preach at least once a month for the foreseeable future. Pray that God will open our hearts and minds, and guide us by the Spirit so that we may strengthen, mature, and equip the church, keeping us gospel centered, and inspiring us to know God more and to share the good news of Jesus with as many as possible.*
* **Discipleship** – *Hiro continues to mentor **Yoshiki** & **Taiga**, and Joel continues to mentor **Kentaro**, **Ryu** & **Mizuki**, but really there is so much coaching and discipling happening on a daily basis in both tangible and intangible ways. **Every week**, we meet online or in person with those who are preparing an upcoming sermon, testimony etc. Please pray that we will have energy, focus and joy, living ourselves as examples of disciples passionate to be with Jesus and to follow His ways.*
* **Seekers** – *continue to pray for these people with whom we seek to share Jesus, and we know the Spirit is at work to draw them to Him: **Shunki, Mayu, Rine, Takumi, and Ryusei**. Also we recently have had one young woman worshipping with us from the community (whom we'll call **'I-san'** for now), a teacher and professional violinist. Please pray for her specifically as well, as we can sense that she is hungering for something more and knows she has found 'something'.*

(Above Top) Joel's birthday celebration with Mito church family members; (Above) Joel & Kristin's anniversary 2 night getaway; (Left) Manaka was intrigued by the tree, stockings & presents; (Left bottom) ringing in the New Year with friends, food & a movie marathon

A SHARED ANNIVERSARY & THREE BIRTHDAYS

*These three months are full of celebrations for our two families: since we did a double wedding, we share the same **wedding anniversary** on **November 22**, and **we celebrated 5 years** this time. The same day is **Kristin's birthday**, so Joel & Kristin took a little 2 night getaway to Sendai.*

*Next, we celebrated **Joel's birthday** on **December 30**, and thankfully we were able to squeak in a little celebration at a new cafe about 3-4 minutes from our house with some of our friends. And finally, **Manaka's birthday** was on **January 15**, so she got to have multiple little 'parties' to celebrate **turning 2 years old**. She even blew out her own candles (with help from Daddy!) and was excited to have fresh strawberries on every birthday cake.*

MORE TO CELEBRATE

***Gaku & Nicole Osugi** are expecting their first child due in April. They have had complications (made more so by COVID) so Nicole is on bedrest to prevent premature labor. Please pray for them as they prepare, and settle into a new home.*

***Kanna Unno** is set to graduate from Ibaraki Christian University in March and will begin working at **StormField** with Gaku after graduation. Please join us in giving thanks!*

Your Partnership & Participation

Financial support can be sent to, or given online through:

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We can also communicate via Facetime and Zoom.